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## The Profile of Asian-American Pastors

Jonathan H. Kim

*Biola University*, [jonathan.kim@biola.edu](mailto:jonathan.kim@biola.edu)

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Jonathan H. Kim

### **abstract**

This case study surveyed 277 and interviewed 47 Asian-American pastors to gather information regarding their demographic characteristics, ministry context, sense of call, spiritual formation, employment status, length of tenure, conflict in ministry, and reasons for ministry or career changes. The purpose of this study was to understand personal and institutional issues affecting Asian-American pastors' ministry tenure.

### **introduction**

A significant relationship exists between long-term pastoral tenure and church growth. While it is valid to believe that long pastorates do not guarantee a church to grow, short pastorates rarely allow for it. In citing Lyle Schaller's work on church growth, Reggie Ogea, professor of leadership and pastoral ministry at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, pointed out a critical connection between long-term pastoral tenure and church growth. He argued that, "While long pastorates do not necessarily produce growing congregations, it is rare to find a congregation that has enjoyed years of sustained numerical growth without the

Great Commission Research Journal, Vol. 5, Iss. 1 [2013], Art. 10 benefits of a long pastorate.”<sup>3</sup> Along the same line of argument, another leading church growth expert, Charles Arn, president of Church Growth, Inc. and visiting professor of outreach and ministry at Indiana Wesleyan University, also noted that, “It is almost unheard of to find a growing church with many short-term pastorates. Frequent change of pastors seems to negate all the other complicated ingredients that go into a church’s growth mix.”<sup>4</sup> In brief, the crux of both arguments is the same: long-term pastoral tenure is a significant predictor of church growth. No matter how stable a local church congregation might be, if pastors are recurrently transitioning in and out of the office, the church will most likely suffer. Long pastorates foster stability toward the sustained fruitfulness and growth of church ministries.

Unfortunately, short-term pastoral tenure has become one of the adverse issues affecting the health and growth of Asian churches in the United States. Significant anecdotal evidence indicated that Asian churches are experiencing a shortage of pastors caused by a destructive cycle of pastoral turnover. The younger generations of pastors are leaving their churches, believing that their ethnic ministries are culturally stifling, irrelevant, and far removed from their lives. Moreover, since support structures for pastors are not readily available in many Asian churches, employing and retaining qualified pastors has become even more arduous for them. A seemingly endless array of cultural, ministerial, and philosophical challenges confronts Asian-American ministries.

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### **purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study was to examine personal and institutional issues affecting Asian-American pastors’<sup>5</sup> ministry tenure. Despite the significant number of Asian-American pastors serving the church in the United States, very little is known about their lives and ministries. While there are countless studies of the pastors serving mainline American churches, very few empirical studies of Asian-American pastors exist. Thus, this study was initiated.<sup>6</sup>

The remainder of this article is divided into two parts, with each part containing four sections. The first part of the article discusses the personal variables affecting the life of Asian-American pastors as it presents information

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<sup>3</sup> Ogea, R. (2009). “Critical Issues in Church Revitalization.” *The Journal of Christian Ministry*. 1: 1–32. Retrieved from <http://journalofchristianministry.org/article/view/4010>

<sup>4</sup> Charles Arn. (2012, November 4). “Pastoral Longevity and Church Growth.” Retrieved from <http://wesleyconnectonline.com>

<sup>5</sup> The term *Asian-American* refers to Americans of Asian descent whose primary worldview and language are that of Americans.

<sup>6</sup> This research was funded by grants from the Lilly Theological Grants program of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) & L2 Foundation.

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regarding their demographic characteristics, ministry context, sense of call, and spiritual formation. The second part of the article discusses the institutional variables affecting the ministry of Asian-American pastors as it presents information regarding their employment status, length of tenure, conflict encountered in ministry, and reasons for ministry or career changes.

### **life of asian-american pastors**

The following details some key findings from the survey. The population intended for the study was the pastors listed in Chuang's index of Asian churches/ministries ([www.djchuang.com](http://www.djchuang.com)) and the Korean-American Ministry Resources website ([www.kamr.org](http://www.kamr.org)).

Based on a careful analysis of these two directories, 733 Asian-American pastors were selected for the study. Invitations to participate in the study were emailed to the pastors (N = 733). No follow-up emails were sent out. Initially, 115 pastors responded, constituting a 16 percent response rate. However, word-of-mouth for the online survey among pastors increased responses to 277 (38 percent response rate). Some survey responses came from outside of the target population. Although the total number of surveys completed increased dramatically, the external validity of the study, on the other hand, decreased significantly.

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### **demographic characteristics**

The demographic characteristics of the participants described in this section are based on a survey of 277 Asian-American pastors (see Table 1). Participants were current and former pastors between the ages of 21 and 65 (average age was 35 years old). Of 277 survey participants, 86 percent of them (n = 231) were men and 14 percent were women (n = 38). In terms of ethnicity, participants were mostly Korean-Americans (43.8 percent) and Chinese-Americans (41.6percent). The rest of the participants were Japanese-Americans (3.7 percent), Vietnamese-Americans (3.4 percent), and other Asian-Americans (7.5 percent). As noted below, 51 percent of these pastors are born in the Untied States, and 88 percent of them (almost 9 out of 10) use English as the primary language.

Survey findings also indicated that about 58 percent of pastors are married, and more than half of them (59 percent) have at least one child (note: 10 percent have one child; 27 percent have two children; 16 percent have three children; 6 percent have four or more children). The mean age of their children was 9.6 years old, which means most of the pastor couples surveyed in this study may have elementary school age children. Descriptive and categorical findings of the pastors surveyed are reported in Table 1.

Demographic Characteristics

		No.	%
Gender:	Male	231	85.9%
	Female	38	14.1%
Age (Average. = 35.4 years old):	21–30 yearsYrs.	77	31.6%
	31–40 yearsYrs.	97	39.8%
	41–50 years Yrs.	48	19.7%
	51–60 yearsYrs.	19	7.8%
	61+ yearsYrs.	3	1.2%
Place of Birth:	U.S./Canada Born	137	50.7%
	Foreign Born	133	49.3%
Ethnicity:	Chinese/Taiwanese-American	111	41.6%
	Korean-American	117	43.8%
	Japanese-American	10	3.7%
	Vietnamese-American	9	3.4%
	Others	20	7.5%
Years Lived in the U.S./Canada:	Mean = 28.58 yrs.		
Primary Language Spoken:	English	238	87.5%
	Other	34	12.5%
Marital Status:	Never Married	108	39.7%
	Married	161	59.2%
	Remarried	3	1.1%

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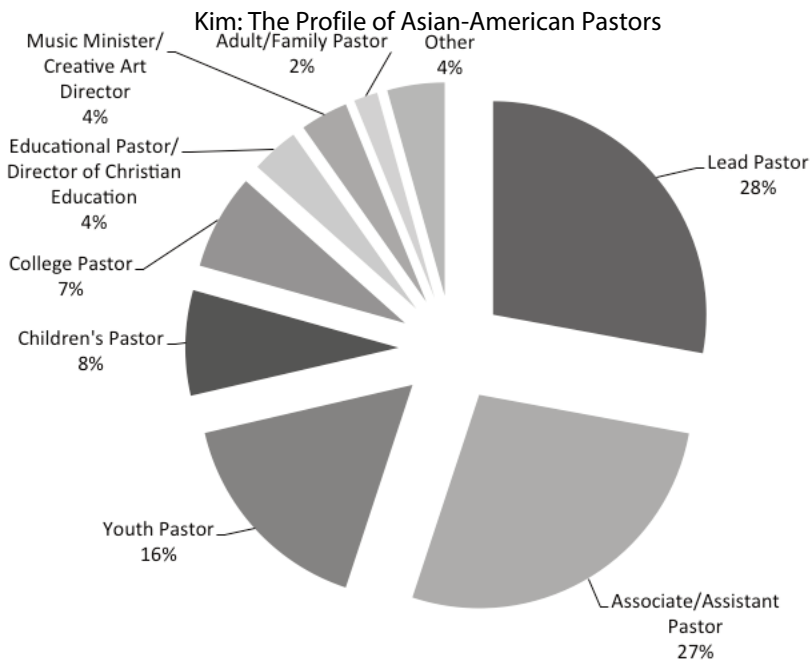
### ministry context

The percentage of Asian-American pastors occupying various English ministry positions is as follows (see Figure 1): with the respect to leadership roles, 28 percent of pastors (about 3 out of 10) hold a lead ministry position. The similar number of pastors (27 percent) holds either an associate or assistant ministry position. The next common position held was the youth pastorate; 16 percent of pastors (almost 2 out of 10) work with either junior high or high school students.

One interesting fact about Asian-American pastors' ministry context is that although half of them (50.7 percent) are born in the United States, and 89 percent of pastors (9 out of 10) use English as the primary language, their ministry is primarily within the first generation Asian-ethnic<sup>7</sup> context; 67 percent of pastors (almost 7 out of 10) work under first generation Asian-ethnic pastors.

In an era where many churches are intentionally hiding their denominational identities, the survey still sought to understand denominational identities of Asian-

<sup>7</sup> The term *Asian-ethnic* refers to Asians who immigrated and established permanent residence in the United States. The primary worldview and language of these Asians is still that of the native countries from where they come.



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**Figure 1**  
Ministry Positions Held

American pastors. This survey found that having a denominational tie is not a major concern for Asian-American pastors. Research data revealed that close to half of the respondents (44.6 percent) claimed that they have no formal denominational ties. Nonetheless, their top three affiliations were with Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) (15.2 percent), Southern Baptist (13 percent), and Presbyterian Church USA (7.6 percent). About 19.6 percent of these pastors were affiliated with other denominations.

The above findings on denominational identity are contrary to what we might expect of Asian-ethnic pastors who view denominational ties important to their pastoral and church identities; they often relate themselves to distinct ethnic and regional denominations. Obviously Americanized pastors do not value denominational heritage quite well as Asian-ethnic pastors.

### **sense of call**

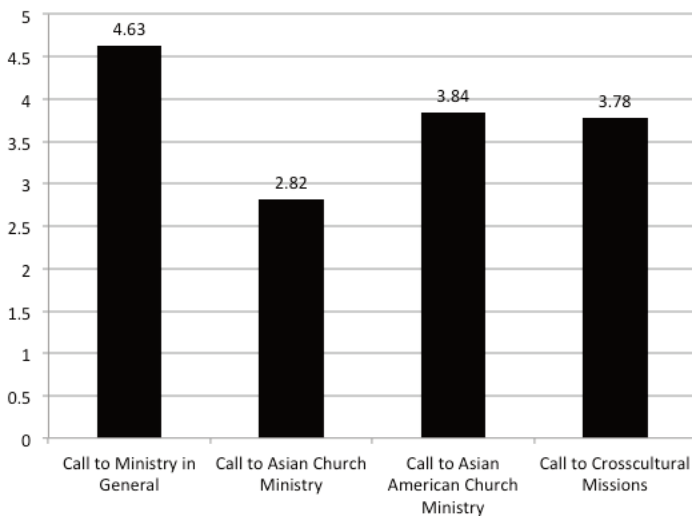
Though debatable, there is a common belief that having a sense of divine call is critical to longevity and satisfaction in ministry. Pastors often argue that having an awareness of God's call, though it could be subjective and even mystical at times, legitimizes their sense of identity and mission in life. Unfortunately, research exploring the significance and function of pastoral call has been relatively scarce,

Great Commission Research Journal, Vol. 5, Iss. 1 [2013], Art. 10 and findings were limited to the pastors serving major American denominations (e.g., Church of the Nazarene, Southern Baptist, PCUSA, United Methodist, and etc.). While these mainline denominational studies offered valuable insights about pastors in general, the issues confronting Asian-American pastors were beyond their scope. For this reason, this portion of the study was designed to examine Asian-American pastors' sense of call in relation to the four ministry types as follows: (1) ministry in general, (2) Asian-ethnic church, (3) Asian-American church, and (4) cross-cultural missions. The study further analyzed the interrelationship of calling and the four ministry types using a Pearson r correlational analysis, which indicates the magnitude and direction of the association between two variables. The findings are discussed below (see Figure 2).

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Of a variety of reasons, nearly all pastors who participated in the study mentioned that they were inspired to take on ministry positions with an inner awareness that they were chosen and led by God into their particular places of ministry. The mean score on ministry in general was 4.63 out of 5 on a Likert scale, which translates as having a “very strong” sense of call. However, the mean score dropped to 3.84 on Asian-American ministry and 3.78 on cross-cultural missions. Still, both scores represent having a “strong” sense of call.

However, when the pastors were asked to identify their sense of call toward Asian-ethnic church ministry, the mean score dropped to 2.82. This score translates as having an “average” sense of call. Interestingly, this relatively low



**Figure 2**

Sense of Call (5-point Likert Scale: 0-None, 1-Very Weak, 2-Weak, 3-Average, 4-Strong, 5-Very Strong)

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**Table 2**

Sense of Call, Perceived Value of Ministry, and Ministry/Life Satisfaction

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Sense of Call	258	4.63	.59
Perceived Value of Ministry	258	4.21	.88
Ministry Satisfaction	259	3.63	.82
Life Satisfaction	259	3.95	.82

mean score on Asian-ethnic church ministry was shared uniformly by many Asian-American pastors. The low sense of call toward Asian-ethnic ministry might be a possible predictor of high pastoral turnover in Asian-ethnic churches.

In order to further analyze the influence that calling has on pastors' perceived value of ministry and satisfaction, a Pearson *r* correlation analysis was utilized below.

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### *Sense of Call and Perceived Value of Ministry*

A significant positive correlation was noted between Asian-American pastors' sense of call and perceived value of ministry ( $r = .282, p < .01$ ). The correlational value of .282 basically means that if a pastor has a sense of call, he or she is 28 percent more likely to value ministry than those who are without. While this degree of relationship is "weak" according to Salkind's numerical index on correlational coefficient,<sup>8</sup> the value of .282 is still statistically significant. This probability is not based on random chance; the *p* value of .01 means that that this predictor is 99 percent accurate. The finding here indicates that any changes in pastors' sense of call will directly affect their perceived value of church ministry, which is one of the predictors of turnover intentions.

### *Sense of Call and Ministry/Life Satisfaction*

Having a sense of call functions as the cornerstone to meaningful ministry and missional life. Findings of the study support a positive association between Asian-American pastors' sense of call and ministry satisfaction ( $r = .368, p < .01$ ) and between their sense of call and life satisfaction ( $r = .310, p < .01$ ). These findings are of particular importance to this research given that pastors' ministry/life satisfaction was not merely contingent on the situational factors such as work conditions, compensation, interpersonal conflict, church size, and etc. Rather,

<sup>8</sup> Neil J. Salkind, *Tests & Measurement for People Who Think They Hate Tests & Measurement* (Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA, 2006), 338.



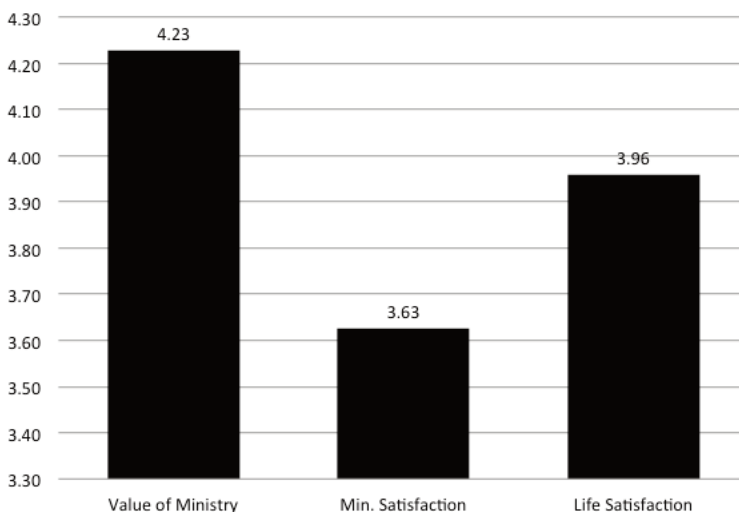
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having a sense of call functioned as an antecedent to the situational factors  
influencing pastors' ministry/life satisfaction.

The following statements can be induced from this portion of analysis: Asian-  
American pastors are 37 percent more likely to experience ministry satisfaction  
and 31 percent more likely to find life satisfaction if they have a personalized  
understanding of God's call. Once again, this predictor is 99 percent accurate  
( $p < .01$ ) and is not based on random chance.

### *Perceived Value of Ministry and Ministry/Life Satisfaction*

Studying the relationship between Asian-American pastors' perceived value of  
ministry and ministry/life satisfaction is critical to understanding pastors' turnover  
intentions. When analyzed, a positive association was noted between pastors'  
perceived value of ministry and ministry satisfaction ( $r = .324, p < .01$ ) and  
between their perceived value of ministry and life satisfaction ( $r = .475, p < .01$ ).  
Again, these values provided important information about the source of pastors'  
ministry/life satisfaction in that if pastors value ministry, they are 32 percent more  
likely to experience ministry satisfaction and 48 percent more likely to experience  
life satisfaction.

From the above analysis, two perspectives can be suggested on the relationship  
between the perceived value of ministry and ministry/life satisfaction. The first  
perspective assumes a more bottom-up approach in which the perceived value of  
ministry is viewed as an underlying source of ministry/life satisfaction. The second



**Figure 3**  
Sense of Satisfaction (5-pt. Likert Scale)

perspective assumes a more top-down approach in that finding ministry/life satisfaction functions as a precursor to value ministry, meaning pastors who find ministry/life satisfaction will tend to value ministry more. Despite either perspectives on the causality of the reciprocity between the value of ministry and ministry/life satisfaction, we need to remember that pastors' turnover intentions are directly linked to all three variables.

#### *Sense of Call, Perceived Value of Ministry, and Ministry/Life Satisfaction*

Arguably, the sense of call could be considered purely as an evaluative measure, whereas the perceived value of ministry is a tradeoff between ministry satisfaction and life satisfaction. As indicated earlier, a pastor's greater sense of call leads to a higher perceived value of ministry, whereas the perceived value of ministry plays a dual role—the higher perceived value of ministry leads to greater ministry satisfaction and consequently to greater life satisfaction.

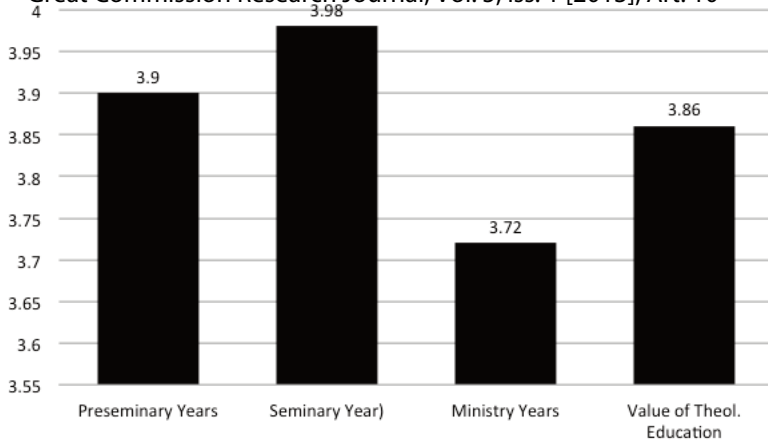
Based on the correlational analysis of Asian-American pastors' sense of call, perceived value of ministry, and ministry/life satisfaction, the following statements can be made: (1) as the sense of call to ministry increases, pastors' perceived value of ministry will increase, and (2) as perceived value of ministry increases, pastors' ministry/life satisfaction of will also increase.

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#### **spiritual formation**

This portion of the study was aimed to investigate Asian-American pastors' self-perceived levels of spiritual formation. As indicated in Figure 4, the mean scores of pre-ministry, seminary, and ministry years were 3.9, 4.0, and 3.7, respectively. The mean score increased slightly from pre-ministry to seminary years (+0.1) but then decreased during ministry years (-0.3). Despite the slight improvement of spiritual formation during seminary years, the difference of +0.1 represents an insignificant change ( $p = .346$ ). However, the decrease of spiritual formation during the ministry phase (-0.3) turned out to be statistically significant ( $p = .018$ ); the change indicates that church ministry has somewhat of a dampening effect on the formation and development of pastors' spirituality.

When pastors were asked to indicate the degree to which seminary prepared them in knowledge and skills for pastoral ministry, participants indicated "strong" ( $M = 3.9$ ) under a 5-point Likert scale (see Figure 4). This "strong" rating on the effectiveness of seminary education stands in contrast to the growing opinions of church leaders commenting on seminaries' ineffectiveness at nurturing students. The strong rating of 3.9 basically means that theological institutions still play a critical role in equipping Asian-American pastors.



**Figure 4**

Spiritual Formation (SF) and Theological Education (5-point Likert Scale: 1-Very Weak, 2-Somewhat Weak, 3-Average, 4- Strong, 5-Very Strong)

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Seminary training is often misconceived as having no direct impact on the spiritual formation of students because the aim of theological education has been largely academic in its orientation. A common assumption is that the content and end of theological studies are irrelevant to students' spiritual development. Presupposed here is the lack of formational elements in the subject matter taught in seminaries. While this preconception may not be too far off from reality for many, it is also distorted by the misconception of theological training. Although a healthy improvement of theological curriculum is still necessary, my study findings indicated that there was a positive outcome of theological education on Asian-American pastors' life and ministry.

### **ministry of asian-american pastors**

Having discussed the personal variables affecting the life of Asian-American pastors, such as their demographic characteristics, ministry context, sense of call, and spiritual formation, we now shift our focus to the institutional variables affecting the ministry of Asian-American pastors. The second half of this article presents information regarding their employment status, length of tenure, conflict in ministry, and reason for ministry or career changes.

### **ministry employment status**

Information regarding the work status of Asian-American pastors is as follows (see Table 3): 44 percent of the participants (n = 105) indicated themselves as

**Table 3**

## Ministry Experience

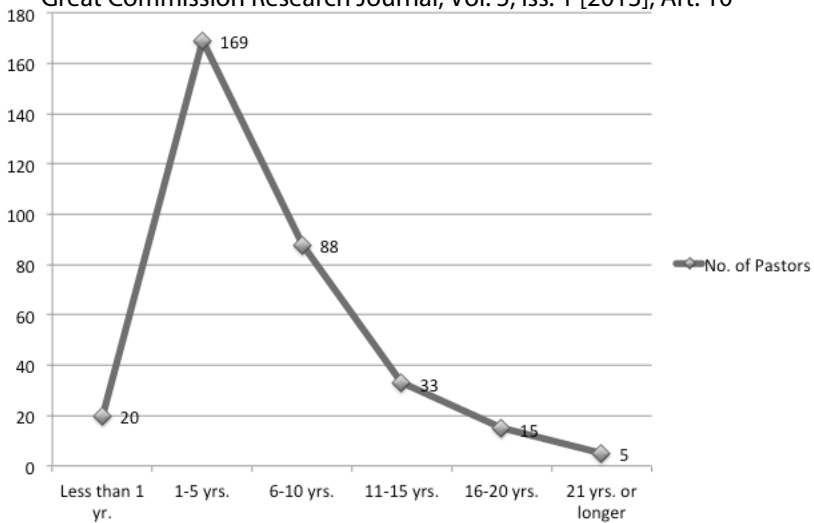
<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>
<b>Length of Tenure in Ministry</b>		
Less than 1 yr.	20	6%
1 to 5 yrs.	169	51%
6–10 yrs.	88	27%
11–15 yrs.	33	10%
16–20 yrs.	15	5%
21 yrs. or longer	5	1%
<b>Employment Status</b>		
Current church staff	105	43.8%
Former church staff	57	23.8%
Bi-vocational	78	32.5%
<b>Serves Under First Generation Asian Pastor</b>		
Yes	171	66.8%
No	85	33.2%
<b>Anticipate to Continue Current Ministry</b>		
Yes	197	77.6%
No	57	22.4%

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current pastors while 24 percent of them ( $n = 57$ ) indicated themselves as former pastors. On the other hand, 32 percent of the participants ( $n = 78$ ) identified themselves as bi-vocational pastors—it is unclear whether these bi-vocational pastors were once full-time local church pastors or not. When pastors were asked whether they anticipate to continue their current ministries or not, 22.4 percent of respondents (2 out of 10) said no—a clear signal of imminent pastoral transitions. However, on a positive note, 11.6 percent of pastors (1 out of 10) indicated that they once left but returned to ministry. We could assume that the percentage of pastors who are leaving the pastorate is compensated by 11.6 percent of pastors returning.

### **length of tenure**

This portion of the study examined the length of pastoral tenure. Pastors varied greatly in the number of years served in ministry, with responses ranging from less than a year to more than 30 years. The average ministerial tenure of the pastors surveyed turned out to be 7.64 years. Of survey respondents, 57 percent (189) indicated that they were in the first 5 years of ministry. This percentage dropped precipitously to 27 percent (88) for those who are in 6–10 years, 10 percent (33) for those in 11–15 years, 5 percent (15) for those in 16–20 years, and then 1 percent (5) for those in 21 years or longer in ministry (see Figure 5).



**Figure 5**  
Number of Years Served in Ministry

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Unfortunately, only about 16 percent of pastors (less than 2 out of 10) have either 11 years or longer of ministry experience. While we cannot assume anything about the actual attrition rate of Asian-American pastors based on this limited cross-sectional data that we have, the small ratio of experienced pastors serving the church is quite alarming and can be a clear indicator that the persistence of Asian-American pastors could be very low. Approaching the issue with a long-term longitudinal study is the only way to tell what their actual attrition rate is like.

Nonetheless, the frequent turnover of pastors has critical ramifications for Asian churches in that it could be quite costly for them to recruit and train the replacements, and for congregants who lose out on the value of being shepherded by seasoned pastors. We need to remember that pastoral persistence promotes congregational growth and administrators toward greater ministry progress. A series of short pastorates rarely allows for healthy church growth.

### **conflict in ministry**

Conflict is inevitable in all organizations, including churches. Given the complexities of personalities that make up the church, conflict becomes an expected outcome of doing ministry. As more Asian churches are seeking to focus on multigenerational and multicultural ministries, the tension between immigrant generation leaders and Asian-American pastors is becoming increasingly difficult

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to manage. Ideological differences and imbalanced power relations often lead to conflict, church splits, and even pastoral turnover.

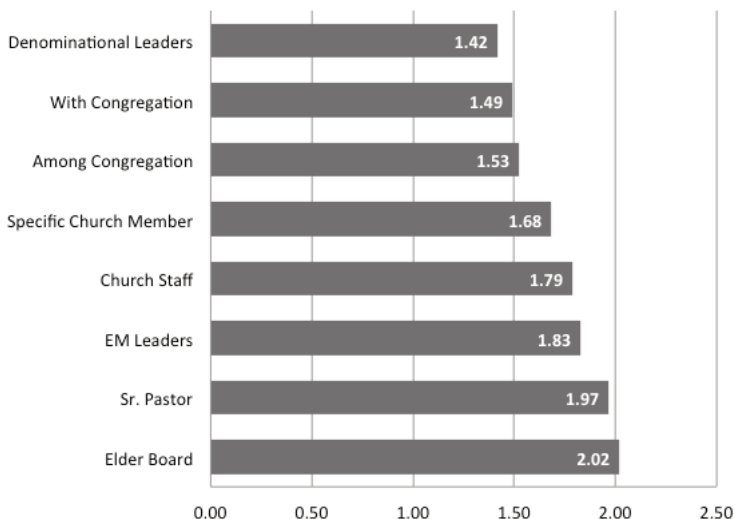
To explore the issue of conflict in the Asian church in the United States, a survey was conducted to gather information on the types and sources of conflict that Asian-American pastors typically experience in ministry. Since the effect of conflict on Asian-American pastoral turnover will be discussed in the subsequent section, this portion of the article simply identifies the most common workplace conflicts and their causes. The findings are stated as follows.

Of 277 pastors, 212 (76 percent) responded to this portion of the survey. They are the pastors who are on the front lines of Asian-American ministry and are able to provide a realistic picture of how conflict plays out in the church. While there were many different types of conflicts that pastors identified, conflicts with their (1) elder board (i.e., immigrant generation), (2) senior pastor (i.e., immigrant generation), and (3) English ministry leaders were by far most challenging and frequent for Asian-American pastors (see Figure 6). Conflicts mainly occurred with church leaders.

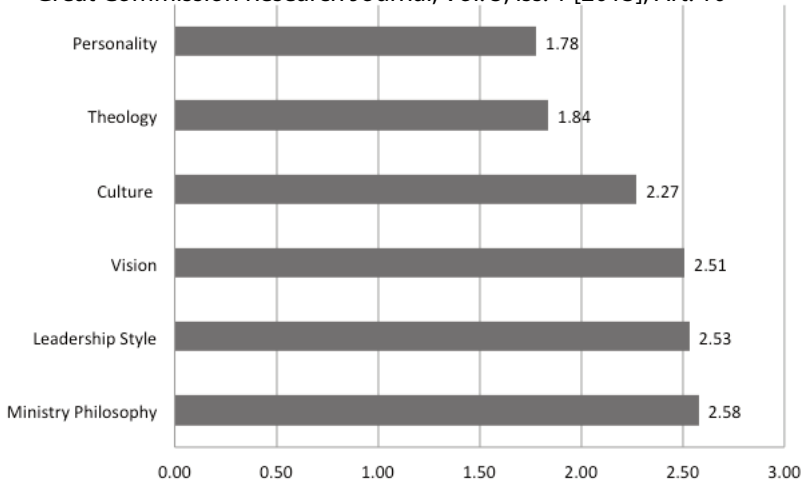
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The main reason for conflict was the rivalry between ideologies. Three primary sources were due to differences in (1) ministry philosophy ( $M = 2.58$ ), (2) leadership styles ( $M = 2.53$ ), and (3) ministry vision ( $M = 2.51$ ) (see Figure 7).

The most common type of conflict faced by pastors varied according to age. Pastors in their twenties and thirties identified “ministry philosophy” as their



**Figure 6**  
Types of Conflict



**Figure 7**  
Sources of Conflict

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number one cause of conflict, while pastors in their forties and fifties identified “leadership style differences.” However, pastors in their sixties reported “theology” as their number one cause of conflict experienced in ministry.

According to interview findings, the causes of conflict mentioned above were directly linked to differences in leadership beliefs and convictions. Disappointment, anger, frustration, and even other negative feelings arose due to the ideological incongruence of ministry philosophy between pastors and leaders—situations where they disagree about the course of action to be chosen for ministry such as goals, tasks, and procedural issues. These ideological or cognitive conflicts produced negative reactions and created tensions between Asian-American pastors and church leaders.

### **factors influencing ministry or career changes**

Why do Asian-American pastors change their ministries or careers? To understand their reasons for changing ministries or careers, Lawson’s instrument on “Reasons for Job/Career Changes”<sup>9</sup> was used. To suit the cultural and ministerial context of Asian-American pastors, some wordings of the instrument were modified. Clustered into four thematic categories—personal (PF), institutional (IF), career development (CDF), and conflict factors (CF)—the instrument lists 70 reasons

<sup>9</sup> Lawson, K. E. (1995). “Reasons for Job/Career Changes.” In *A Survey of Current and Former Church Educational Ministry Staff in North America*. Unpublished Instrument. La Mirada, CA: Talbot School of Theology, Biola University.

**Table 4**

Top Five Reasons for Ministry or Vocation Changes (N = 240 Pastors)

<i>Reasons</i>	<i>Categorical Domain</i>
1. For Greater Ministry Opportunities (M = 2.91)	Career Development Factor (CDF)
2. Conflicts due to philosophical differences in ministry (M = 2.66)	Conflict Factor (CF)
3. Conflicts due to leadership style differences (M = 2.58)	Conflict Factor (CF)
4. For Further Education/Training (M = 2.57)	Personal Factor (PF)
5. Conflicts due to ministry vision difference (M = 2.50)	Conflict Factor (CF)

influencing pastors' decisions to either change church employers or careers. Of 277 survey participants, 105 current pastors (44 percent), 57 former pastors (24 percent), and 78 bi-vocational pastors (32 percent) completed the survey.

Unfortunately, 37 participants skipped their responses to this survey for unknown reasons. The following section provides a breakdown of pastors' reasons for changing ministries or careers in the past.

Though myriad factors influenced pastors' decisions to either change churches or careers in the past, the top five reasons emerged from this survey based on the input of all pastors (N = 240) were: (1) "for greater ministry opportunities," (2) "conflicts due to philosophical differences in ministry," (3) "conflicts due to leadership style differences," (4) "for further education/training," and (5) "conflicts due to ministry vision differences" (see Table 4). While career development and personal reasons were among the top five, it is quite interesting to note that three of the five reasons for changing ministries or careers were caused by conflicts stemming from ideological differences in ministry philosophy, leadership, and vision.

Pastors' reasons for changing ministries or careers varied according to job status. Current pastors' reasons for switching churches were mainly due to conflicts. Their top three reasons were: (1) "unhealthy spiritual environment with the whole church" (IF), (2) "conflicts due to philosophical differences in ministry" (CF), and (3) "conflicts due to leadership style differences" (CF). Former pastors' reasons for changing their careers were general in nature. Their reasons were: (1) "for further education/training" (PF), (2) "need for a better personal support system" (IF), and (3) "lack of challenge, wanted to make better use of skills/personal gifts" (CDF). On the other hand, bi-vocational pastors' reasons were mainly for their ministry career developments. Their reasons for becoming



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bi-vocational pastors were: (1) “for greater ministry opportunities” (CDF), (2) “looking for ministry with compatible vision” (CDF), and (3) “conflicts due to philosophical differences in ministry” (CF).

The 54 pastors who indicated that they were not planning to continue their current ministry mainly listed career development reasons for their future plan. Their reasons were: (1) “lack of challenges, wanted to make better use of skills/personal gifts” (CDF), (2) “for further education/training” (CDF), and (3) “change of calling” (CDF).

The reasons for changing ministries or careers varied according to marital status. Single pastors’ reasons were mainly personal in nature as follows: (1) “for further education/training” (PF), (2) “unmet personal needs (PF), and (3) “too much work press/stress” (IF). Married pastors’ reasons, on the other hand, were mainly linked to the conflict domain. They were: (1) “for greater ministry opportunities” (CDF), (2) “conflicts due to ministry vision differences” (CF), and (3) “conflicts due to philosophical differences in ministry” (CF).

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In analyzing reasons for ministry or career changes according to gender, different reasons were shared by male and female pastors. A close inspection of participants’ responses revealed that male pastors’ reasons were directly related to conflicts while female pastors’ reasons were personal in nature. Male pastors’ reasons were: (1) “conflicts due to philosophical differences in ministry” (CF), (2) “for greater ministry opportunities (CDF), and (3) “conflicts due to leadership style differences” (CF). However, female pastors’ reasons were: (1) “for further education/training” (PF), (2) “too much work press/stress” (IF), and (3) “unmet personal needs” (PF).

On the contrary to all of the reasons mentioned above, least likely causes of Asian-American pastors’ ministry or career changes, meaning the bottom 5 of the 70 reasons, cited by all pastors (N = 240) were: (70) “conflicts with the denomination leaders” (CF), (69) “conflicts with congregation in general” (CF), (68) “conflicts within the congregation” (CF), (67) “position dropped by the church” (IF), and (66) “no new ministry position available when a move was necessary” (CDF).

Exploring Asian-American pastors’ reasons for ministry or career changes provided pertinent insights into what should be done to help these pastors find satisfaction and stay in ministry. Arguably, we could assume that Asian-American pastors are more likely to switch churches or careers due to differences in ministry philosophy rather than other reasons such as finance, health, work demand, church size, denomination, and etc. Overall, Asian-American pastors’ reasons for

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changing ministries or careers find their roots in a struggle for ideological credence. Despite problems of cultural dissonance, a phenomenon created by competing worldviews between Asian-ethnic and Asian-American cultures, the pastors are simply trying to legitimize their view of ministry in the church.

Since Asian-American pastors often work in multicultural, multigenerational, and multilingual environments, the conflict stemming from ideological differences has always been the leading cause of their ministry or career changes. Promoting open dialogue and collegiality with church leaders will definitely enhance the longevity of Asian-American pastors. To do so, pastors and leaders must recognize and negotiate their worldview differences with proper respect for one another in Christ.

### conclusion

This case study sought to gather information regarding Asian-American pastors' demographic characteristics, ministry context, sense of call, spiritual formation, employment status, length of tenure, conflict encountered in ministry, and reasons for ministry or career changes. While these findings may not be generalizable beyond the selected group of pastors, the study is still pertinent in that it is one of the few empirical studies that sought to understand the life and ministry of Asian-American pastors.

From the study findings, it can be concluded that the work of a pastor in Asian-ethnic and Asian-American churches is difficult. In most cases, Asian-American pastors jump into church ministry with great enthusiasm. Soon their hearts are crushed, their confidence crumbled, their souls wounded, and some even leave their ministries. Despite the difficulties they face in ministry, many of these wounded pastors are still heading back to their churches, seeking to remain faithful to their calling.

In reflecting back to many interviews that I had with Asian-American pastors, I could definitely say that they are deeply committed to the cause of the local church in fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20). Despite numerous problems they face, many pastors expressed their desire for life-long ministry as Christ's disciples, like how the apostle Paul was. Perhaps what the apostle Paul said to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:24 recapitulates in essence how Asian-American pastors feel about ministry. I will close this article as I dedicate the verse to all Asian-American pastors who are laboring diligently for the cause of Christ: "I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and

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complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good  
news of God’s grace” (NIV). To God be the glory!

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Jonathan Kim is an Associate Professor of Christian education at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University in La Mirada, CA. His areas of expertise include faith formation, ministry philosophy, and qualitative research methods. He holds a Ph.D. in Educational Studies (1999), an M.A. (1993) and an M.Div. (1992) from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL. In addition to full-time teaching and research, he is actively involved in multiethnic church ministry. He can be reached at: jonathan.kim@biola.edu; 562-944-0351.